

## PARASHAT VAYIKRA

### The Meal-Offering

By Dr. Jonathan Grossman

Parshat Vayikra describes three types of voluntary sacrifices, i.e., sacrifices which a person decides of his own free will to bring to the mishkan. (Following these, the parasha goes on to describe the obligatory sacrifices: the sin offering [chatat] and the guilt offering [asham], which a person is required to bring under certain circumstances.)

The various options open to a person wishing to bring a voluntary sacrifice are the burnt offering (olah – chapter 1), the mincha (chapter 2) or the shelamim (chapter 3). While the olah and shelamim are animal sacrifices, the mincha is not: "his offering shall be of fine flour (solet)" (2:1).

I would like to address one of the major questions that arises in view of the location of the commandment concerning the mincha sacrifice.

The literary style of the Torah is such that a general rule is usually followed by various details pertaining to that general rule. The formulation is usually in the form of "When (ki)... if (im)..." In other words, the general rule opens with the word "ki," and the details are introduced with the word "im." An outstanding example of this is to be found in parashat Mishpatim, where there are several general laws ("ki") followed by a list of possible specific cases ("im"), for example:

"When (ki) you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall labor for six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing.

If (im) he came in [to servitude] by himself, he shall leave by himself.

If (im) he is married, his wife shall leave with him.

If (im) his master gave him a wife and she bore him sons or daughters, the wife and her children will be her master's, and he will go out by himself.

And if (ve-im) the servant should say..." (Shemot 21:2-5)

A similar phenomenon is to be found in parashat Vayikra, where the Torah again supplies a general introduction using the word "ki," and then lists details beginning with "im." Thus we find at the beginning of the parasha dealing with the sacrifices:

"When (ki) a person from among you brings a sacrifice to God, from the cattle – from the herd and from the flock – shall you bring your sacrifice.

If (im) his sacrifice is a burnt offering (olah)...

And if (im) his sacrifice is from the flocks – from the sheep or from the goats, as a burnt offering...

And if (im) his burnt offering to God is from the birds..."

The general introduction deals with a person who wishes to bring an animal sacrifice, and thereafter the text starts to list the various options available to this person. The first possibility is that of an "olah," which itself is further subdivided – it may be "from the cattle," "from the flock" or "from the birds."

Now the reader expects to find further options for animal sacrifices, since otherwise the introduction, "When a person from among you brings a sacrifice to God, from the cattle..." is not appropriate as an introduction, but rather represents a single law that stands on its own. Indeed, the continuation of the list of possibilities for animal sacrifices is resumed at the beginning of chapter 3:

"And if (ve-im) his sacrifice is a peace offering:

If (im) he offers it from the herd...

And if (ve-im) his offering is from the flock..."

Thus, there are two categories of possibilities from which the person wishing to offer an animal sacrifice may choose: either an "olah" (burnt offering) or a "shelamim" (peace offering).

However, the order of the different sacrifices is not as we would have expected. After the laws pertaining to the olah in chapter 1, the text – surprisingly enough – goes on to

discuss the mincha (chapter 2). This sacrifice cannot represent an additional instance that falls under the general introduction with which the parasha of the sacrifices began, because the introduction specifically mentions an animal sacrifice, while the mincha is a vegetable sacrifice!

This is further substantiated by the fact that the mincha opens with its own, new introduction ("ki"):

"And when (ki) a person offers a mincha sacrifice to God, his offering shall be of fine flour." (2:1)

Without doubt, this introduction is meant to serve as a parallel to the previous one, with which the animal sacrifices began:

"When (ki) a person from among you brings a sacrifice to God, from the cattle – from the herd and from the flock – shall you bring your sacrifice." (1:2)

Chapter 2, then, starts with its own independent introduction, since the Torah is now going to discuss a meal offering, while the original introduction prepared us for animal sacrifices. Why, then, does the text interrupt its discussion of animal sacrifices and start a new discussion concerning the flour offering, and only thereafter continue with another animal sacrifice – the "zevach shelamim," which complements the olah? This is the Abarbanel's ninth question on our parasha:

"Why does the Torah discuss the laws of the mincha in all its varieties prior to the shelamim? After all, since the shelamim is taken from the cattle or from the herds, we would have thought that it should be commanded prior to the mincha."

I follow the lead of R. David Zvi Hoffmann with regard to this question. The Malbim explains that apparently the mincha is mentioned in close proximity with the olah because of the internal connection between them. In other words, the mincha is a sort of "comment in parentheses" that is mentioned here in connection with the olah. R. Hoffmann shows that in essence the mincha too, like the olah, is offered in its entirety to God, but God decides to give of it to His servants, the kohanim. This we learn from the law of a special mincha of which the kohanim are forbidden to partake – the "minchat chinukh shel kohen" (initiatory meal offering of the kohen):

"It is a statute forever to God; it shall be entirely burnt. And every meal offering of the kohen shall be entirely burnt; it shall not be eaten." (6:-15-16)

If, for whatever reason, the kohanim do not eat their portion of the mincha sacrifice, then the mincha is offered in its entirety to God, as an "olah."

This law is especially interesting when compared with that of another sacrifice in similar circumstances (i.e., where the kohanim are prevented from consuming their portion of the meat), where the sacrifice is not burnt in its entirety (like the minchat chinukh), but rather the portion usually set aside for the kohen is burnt outside of the camp. This is the law of the innards of the "chatat" sacrifices, which, because their blood is absorbed inwards, are forbidden to be eaten, and the meat is therefore burnt outside of the camp (4:12, 21).

Thus the mincha in essence belongs to the altar, even if the kohanim usually eat part of it.

In light of this, we can understand another law that appears in the parasha of the mincha. The law regulating the partaking of the sacrifices by the kohanim or – in the case of the shelamim – by the person who brings the sacrifice, always appears only in the second listing of the sacrifices, in parashat Tzav. An exception to this rule is the mincha, concerning which we are told already in parashat Vayikra that whatever remains of it may be eaten by the kohanim. Perhaps the Torah sees fit to "explain" how it happens that the kohanim eat of a sacrifice that is supposed to be offered in its entirety to God. The explanation is formulated in the following words:

"And that which remains of the mincha is for Aharon and his sons; it is a holy of holies of the offerings made by fire to God." (2:3, 10)

Although the kohanim eat of the mincha, it is still to be regarded as having been offered entirely to God, and the kohanim are given the privilege of eating "from God's table," as it were.

Indeed, the mincha is very often juxtaposed with the olah. Sometimes the shelamim is presented in contrast. Thus, for example, in the story of the altar built by the children of Reuven, Gad and the half-tribe of Menasheh: "...or to offer a burnt offering or a meal offering upon it, or to offer peace offerings upon it" (Yehoshua 22:23) – the olah and mincha on one hand, the shelamim on the other.

Because of this connection between the olah and mincha, the text juxtaposes these two sacrifices even though the mincha is not one of the categories that falls under the first heading, which deals specifically with animal sacrifices.

A similar idea is presented by the Abarbanel (2:1):

"The mincha offerings are mentioned prior to the shelamim for two reasons: In order to prioritize the levels of the olah... and the mincha is among them; therefore after mentioning the olah from the cattle, which is the most superior, and the olah of the flocks which is the next level, and then the olah of the birds which is after that, the Torah mentions the mincha WHICH IS ALSO AN OLAH and its level is one lower than that of the olah of the birds, since an animal of any type is superior to a meal sacrifice. But the shelamim is not an olah, and therefore it is mentioned last."

The essential connection between these two sacrifices (expressed in the halakhic connection between them) turns on the intention of the person who offers them: each involves an attitude of complete sacrifice before the Master of the Universe, a psychological sense of unworthiness to stand before God – an attitude of honor and awe.

[The olah contains a note of atonement even though it is a free-will offering – "...it shall be accepted for him to atone for him" (1:4). This is the impression we gain from the olah sacrifices offered by Iyov for his children: "...for Iyov said, Perhaps my children have sinned, and have cursed God in their hearts" (Iyov 1:5). See also the Ramban's commentary on 1:4.]

But at the same time there would appear to be a fundamental difference between the olah and the mincha (in contrast with the Abarbanel's proposition that they are to be considered identical). The hint at the difference between them is to be found in the two introductions. In the case of the olah, the Torah begins with the words, "adam ki yakriv" (literally, "a person, when he offers..."), while the mincha opens with the words, "ve-nefesh ki yakriv" (literally, "a soul, when he offers..."). Chazal note this discrepancy:

"For what reason is the [introduction to the] mincha changed, to say 'nefesh?' The Holy One said, Who is it who usually brings a mincha? A poor person. I will [therefore] consider it as though he sacrifices his soul (nefesh) before Me." (Menachot 104b)

The discrepancy in the introduction may also hint at something else. In the context of sacrifices, the term "nefesh" has a clear association:

"For the life (nefesh) of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to atone for your souls (nafshotekhem), for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul (nefesh)." (Vayikra 17:11)

"Nefesh" expresses the life itself, embodied in the blood – including the blood of the olah that is offered upon the altar. We may therefore propose that in the case of those sacrifices whose blood is offered, we cannot speak of a "nefesh" offering the sacrifice, since the nefesh (or at least that which symbolizes it) is sacrificed on the altar. However, in the case of the mincha, where there is no blood – i.e., the nefesh is not offered upon the altar – we may say that it is the nefesh which offers the sacrifice.

In other words, by the act of sacrificing an animal the worshipper declares that his life, his very existence, belongs to his Maker, and therefore he offers a life upon the altar. By offering a mincha he is declaring something not about his life but rather about his food and his other vital needs. A person brings his meal to the mishkan, adds oil (a symbol of wealth [1]) and levona (a symbol of contentment, according to some of the commentaries – see Rav S.R. Hirsch) and declares that all of this does not belong to him and he is not worthy of it, and therefore he brings it to its true Owner – the Master of the Universe.

This idea also finds expression in the quantity of fine flour that is always required for a mincha offering: a tenth of an "efa." This quantity apparently represents a person's food for one day. This we learn from the parasha of the manna, where Bnei Yisrael are required to take an "omer" per person each day (Shemot 16:16). At the end of the parasha we read, "And the omer is a tenth of an efa" (Shemot 16:36) – teaching us that a person's food for one day is a tenth of an efa. Rashi immediately comments on the connection with the mincha: "A tenth of an efa... and that is the set quantity for challa and for mincha offerings" (Shemot 16:36). There seems to be a profound connection between the descent of the manna – God providing food for man – and the mincha offering, where man "gives" food upon the altar, but a discussion of this idea lies outside the scope of this shiur. In any event, by bringing a mincha a person offers his daily bread to its true owner – God.

In summary, the mincha offering appears immediately after the laws of the olah because of the close connection between them – a connection related to the religious declaration that accompanies each of these, in which the person expresses his sense of unworthiness of all the good that God is showering upon him.[2] The religious feeling that is expressed in the olah pertains to the person's very existence: he feels that his life is not his own, and he sacrifices a "life" – a "soul" – upon the altar. In contrast – or perhaps as a continuation – the sentiment that finds expression in the mincha pertains to a person's needs – his food and physical welfare. These, as it were, he brings to the altar as a declaration that he is unworthy of them, and that God is their true owner.

(Translated by Kaeren Fish)

## FOOTNOTES

[1] We see that oil (shemen) is a symbol of wealth in Yaakov's blessing to Asher: "From Asher his bread will be fat (shemena)" (Bereishit 49:20), and in the instructions Moshe gives to the spies who are sent to Canaan: "Whether [the land] is fat (shemena) or thin" (Bemidbar 13:20).

[2] This is in contrast to the shelamim, which expresses a completely different religious sentiment – a feeling of joy and neighborliness. This idea was addressed in the VBM shiur on parashat Tzav two years ago.

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